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Whatever You Say, Wherever You Are

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WHATEVER YOU SAY, WHEREVER YOU ARE
for Rick Heilman

Birch and maple bow, giving themselves back
to the ground this autumn, and every walk
through leaves begins the clatter of all
that lies detached. Something from a river
in that noise: the voice calls, coming at you
in water bending speech around the rock.

I hear you tonight in the scuff of heels.
Whatever you say, I risk believing:
the room you sit in now, the gold decor
and light, children, a young wife, anything.
Whatever you say follows like a bell
ringing itself. Bell of autumn walking,

bell of incense and our First Communion,
bells of longing—the bell these fourteen years.
I sit down at the bank and your words
catch current in the stream. My feet stalled,
I wonder at my trust of shoes,
their ever-walking toward, a dream of meeting you

some Sunday at the store. You'd buy your smokes,
turn, walk out, and there we would be, agape:
longest gone of friends. But all the leaves
are fire now, candles burning low and rising
as our voices rise. The prayer of priests here
drowns out whispers in the fresco, breath

of saints. This Mass they celebrate for children
lost at night, carried with the fish to sea.